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FORWARD PRESENCE: IS IT AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER?

by

James H. Flatley IV

Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.
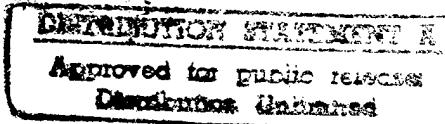
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Since the "Revolt of the Admirals" in 1949, an interservice rivalry has persisted between the Navy and the Air Force. The current debate, similar to the one fifty years ago, has the Air Force promoting its bombers as a more cost effective weapon in comparison to the flexible and responsive aircraft carrier.

In the post-Cold War world, the military has experienced a drawdown typical of past post war periods. With each new commission tasked to study the size and structure of the four services, white papers have been published justifying the existence of hardware. The Navy and Air Force, in particular, have produced a combined total of five papers to support their positions. The Air Force believes that its once dominating strategic nuclear bombers can be reconstituted as a force capable of providing forward presence through virtual means. The Navy offers no new visionary ideas; rather, it relies on history and past success to illustrate that forward presence continues to require forces that are forward deployed and visible.

Over seas presence must be forward deployed and proactively engaged with friends and allies to demonstrate commitment in protecting the nation's vital interests. Virtual presence alone will not suffice, but strategic bombers and space based assets do have a part to play as a complementary force to those deployed overseas.

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In the post-Cold War world Cold War, the military has experienced a drawdown typical of past post war periods. With each new commission tasked to study the size and structure of the four services, white papers have been published justifying the existence of hardware. The Navy and Air Force, in particular, have produced a combined total of five papers to support their positions. The Air Force believes that its once dominating strategic nuclear bombers can be reconstituted as a force capable of providing overseas presence through virtual means. The Navy offers no new visionary ideas; rather, it relies on history and past success to illustrate that overseas presence continues to require forces that are forward deployed and visible.

Overseas presence must be forward deployed and proactively engaged with friends and allies to demonstrate commitment in protecting the nation's vital interests. Virtual means alone will not suffice, but strategic bombers and space based assets do have a part to play as a complementary force to those deployed overseas.

*...modern warfare can be effectively conducted only by the close
and effective integration of the three military arms, which make
their primary contribution to the military power of the Nation on
the ground, at sea, and from the.air.*

-Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King
U.S. Navy at War, 1941-1945

INTRODUCTION

The Cold War, at least, brought some sense of order to the Armed Forces of the

United States. Before the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it was clearly evident

what everybody's roles were: each service brought something unique to the fight, no one

spoke of redundancy of forces, and no one openly downplayed the other service's

capabilities in order to get a bigger slice of the pie. In essence, no one disturbed the

status quo, at least publicly. In the aftermath of the Cold War that all changed. What

followed was a series of reviews: the Commission on Roles and Missions, the Bottom-Up

Review, the National Defense Panel and beginning this year the Quadrennial Defense

Review. These reviews rejuvenated healthy discussions amongst the Services and

spurred a new flurry of arguments, most aimed at protecting one's turf and assets. In

particular, the Navy and the Air Force have been engaged for several years in a "write for

your life" campaign which has produced, among other things, several white papers and

other articles expanding respective visions. The Navy, in order to preserve its capital

ship, the aircraft carrier, shifted focus from independent blue water operations to littoral

warfare; the text of which is found in *...From the Sea* and subsequently updated with

Forward...From the Sea and supported by the Marine Corps' *Operational Maneuver*

From the Sea. The Air Force, in justifying the existence of its strategic bomber fleet,

published *Global Reach-Global Power* and updated it with *Global Presence 1995,*

extolling the advantages of virtual presence as a new innovative approach for its strategic mission.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has been actively engaged around the world promoting peace and strengthening alliances through forward presence at sea and ashore. Recent reductions in permanently forward based forces as a result of budget constraints and a changing international environment, have now made routine air, ground and naval deployments a necessary and essential element in carrying out the strategic concepts of the *National Security Strategy* and *National Military Strategy.* Forward presence, an essential element of both strategies, performs a variety of activities that promote stability and prevent conflict. Forward presence provides visible proof of our commitment to defend American interests with our allies and friends worldwide.[1]

As the United States continues to adjust to the post-Cold War world and the realities of a shrinking defense budget, an ongoing examination is necessary to determine what combination of forward deployed forces will have the greatest effect. It will require determining what forces can be available in a region or that can deploy to a region on short notice which will have the greatest deterrent effect.[2] Do naval forces, as presently proven, constitute a credible deterrent when forward? Is it correct to assume that a strategic bomber with tactical capability, which can be any where in the world in 20 hours, represents a credible presence? History shows, and the *National Security Strategy* articulates, that a credible forward deployed force stationed in key oversea regions in peacetime deters aggression and advances U.S. strategic interests. It demonstrates our commitment to allies and friends, underwrites regional stability, ensures familiarity with

overseas operating environments, promotes combined training among forces of friendly countries, and provides timely initial response capabilities.[3]

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history
is the most important of all lessons that History has to teach.*

Aldous Huxley

The argument over roles and missions and the more characteristic bomber versus aircraft carrier debate are not new. The arguments date back to the late 1940s when the newly formed independent air force, lead by Stuart Symington, launched an elaborate public relations blitzkrieg, orchestrated by Stephen F. Leo, extolling the virtues of the B-36 over the Navy's newly proposed aircraft carrier the *USS United States.* The Air Force was convinced that strategic bombing promised certain victory in any future conflict. During this same period, a second debate had begun to command the attention of senior military leadership. A Joint Strategic Survey Committee (JSSC) report issued in February 1946 attempted to define primary missions by the element each service operated in; central to the debate was land-based air responsibilities.[4] Pandora's box had just been opened with respect to roles and missions. The same arguments exist today as they did fifty years ago. For instance, simply transcribe B-2 for B-36--the old bomber versus aircraft carrier debate; an oversimplification of the broader issues of today, but nonetheless, an illustration of how unremarkable the past fifty years have been in resolving the question of roles and missions.

Since the end of World War II, theories, doctrines, and defense budgets have centered on a single quantifiable enemy and gave rise to the development and construction of

ships, submarines, aircraft, ground armor, nuclear ballistic missiles and associated

tactics. For over forty years, this military hardware stood ready around the world

to guard against Soviet expansionism. Based upon the successes and failures of World

War II and the emergence of the Soviet threat, the Navy and a new naval strategy

evolved. Through its use of air power, it had demonstrated the ability to project power

ashore. Thus, the Navy declared an offensive air capability centered around the aircraft

carrier as the primary instrument of naval power.[5] Additionally, the creation of an

independent air force during this period became of concern to the Navy leaders and their

new found strategy. If the Air Force was capable of projecting power across the oceans

with a weapon of mass destruction, what need would there be for a forward deployed

Navy? The response to this emerging strategic struggle provided the context for all

remaining decisions about the post-war Navy.[6]

The creation of an independent air force added a new dimension to the development

of air power as a paramount and decisive weapon of waging war. The Air Force, prior to

and after the war, was conceived around a strategic theory pioneered by the writings of

General Guilio Douhet, generally acknowledged to be the first to advance air strategy in

what he called *Command of the Air*.[7] Although flawed in some respects, Douhet's

writings gave legitimacy to the Air Force's idea of strategic bombing, given the successes

of the fire bombings of Japanese cities and the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In furthering the theory of air power, General Hap Arnold, who went one step further--

running counter to Douhet's theory--by fighting for an independent air force superior in

capability to the fighting effectiveness of the other services thus justifying the Air Force's

lion share of the defense budget.[8] The Air Force saw little utility in an aircraft carrier in

future conflicts. As one of its strongest air power proponents, General Billy Mitchell wrote:

> *As airplane carrying vessels are of no use against hostile air forces with bases on shore, and as they can only be of use against other vessels or hostile fleets that are on the surface of the water, and as these fleets will be supplemented by submarines, there is little use for the retention of airplane carriers in the general scheme of armaments.*[9]

The congressional hearings, in 1949, did little to resolve the differences between the two services, much as the Commission on Roles and Missions did little to resolve the same issues in 1993. This competition continues today in an era of putative military "jointness." The Services' differing strategic perspectives and doctrines, which result in part from their operating environments, guarantee that the services will have competing views on roles and missions.[10]

FORWARD PRESENCE

> *Forward presence demonstrates U.S. commitment, strengthens deterrence, and facilitates transition from peace to war...*
>
> General Binford Peay

In the present climate of declining defense budgets, shrinking force structure, and a reduction in permanently stationed overseas forces, it has become extremely important to properly balance the unique abilities of each service to protect our national interests. Fundamental to this process will be the ability to maintain a credible presence around the world that is forward deployed, combat ready, and proactively engaged in demonstrating our commitment to friends and allies. The strategic concept of forward presence offers more than just the ability to demonstrate our commitment to friends and allies; it also

supports the strategic objectives through an enduring contribution to strategic deterrence, sea control and maritime supremacy, and strategic sealift.[11]

The *National Security Strategy* of the United States has an overarching goal of spreading democracy and free markets by fostering stability and global markets. Similarly, the *National Military Strategy* puts a high premium on deployed forces.[12] History has shown repeatedly over the past half century that forward deployed naval forces, along with permanently based overseas forces, have been one of the key ingredients in safeguarding the nation's national interests by denying the political and/or military objectives of a potential aggressor. The loss of overseas bases (two-thirds in Europe) and the return of over 200,000 troops has placed the primacy of overseas presence squarely in the lap of today's forward deployed naval forces.

Critics will quickly point out the weaknesses of forward deployed naval forces as either too expensive as a symbol of American commitment or as too susceptible to mines, cruise missile attacks, or Silkworms. Yet, launching carrier sorties in support of Operation Deny Flight, or providing presence in the eastern Pacific with *USS Independence* (CV 62) and *USS Nimitz* (CVN 68) during heightened tensions between Taiwan and China in 1996, and the commitment they symbolize, has answered the call of decision makers through flexibility and readiness in responding to over 70 joint contingencies since 1991. This was accomplished without loss of ships, aircraft, or men. The value of a deployed battle group was clearly demonstrated, again, in September 1996, when aircraft from the *USS Carl Vinson*(CVN 70) escorted B-52s launching cruise missiles against Iraqi command-and-control and air defense targets during Operation

Desert Strike. A mission that otherwise, would not have been undertaken without battle group support.

Forward deployed naval forces, combined with other elements of national power, help to shape the international environment by influencing the perceptions and conduct of potential aggressors, friends and allies, and neutral nations in key areas around the globe.[13] The aircraft carrier's flexibility presents the National Command Authorities and regional CINCs with a wide range of options in dealing with a potential aggressor without violating its territorial waters. Additionally, naval forces are not constrained by basing rights or host nation sensitivities. Whether visible off shore or positioned over-the-horizon, the Navy's ability to remain indefinitely sends a clear signal of commitment. In times of conflict, the ability to project power ashore, including deep strike, is crucial to enabling follow-on forces to deploy to a region. The uniqueness of naval forces is crucial across the spectrum—from peacekeeping to war.

VIRTUAL PRESENCE

In an environment influenced by so many variables, how should America best pursue the continuing need for presence? One way is through Global Presence.

Global Presence 1995

In order for presence to be credible, it must be visible and forward deployed. The Air Force thinks otherwise; it seeks to expand the traditional concept of presence by introducing a contemporary approach--virtual presence.[14] Can the Air Force and its 20 B-2s provide forward, sustainable, on-station presence through virtual presence? Will the Air Force be perceived by potential aggressors as a credible deterrent force while loitering overhead only in the dark of night?

The technological edge in space based sensors affords the Air Force the ability to monitor events around the world and respond with a lethal force, if necessary, within twenty-four hours. Although this may be fiscally appealing, given the realities of today's defense budget, it is a concept as yet untested. Technological advances in military hardware, hopefully, always offer increased capability; but none to date have proven to be the ultimate weapon of war. "In an uncertain world, decision makers will need flexible and adaptable forces that are credible, usable, lethal, and when deployed, decisive."[15]

Exerting presence through virtual presence should not be seen as an alternative to reduce the cost of the military infrastructure or replace the need for forward deployed forces; it should merely serve as a force multiplier, complementing deployed forces and enhancing joint warfighting capabilities. Eyes in the sky will never be capable of executing the multiplicity of missions carried out by forward deployed forces during the past decade. In the vast array of military operations other than war, virtual presence offers little in terms of effectively using B-2s for such missions. Even if credible, the B-2 will fall short of the CINC's needs to carry out the national military strategy, as now defined. They must be a credible and robust force. History is replete with examples that demonstrate the value of being in or near a region where an anticipated or surprise aggressor initially posed a threat to America's national interests and/or international human rights. An analysis of the recent past from 1946-1982 reflects that of the 258 uses of military response to problems around the world, initial presence was provided by naval forces (81%), land-based air (48%), and ground forces (21%), jointly or independently.[16]

Virtual presence will unquestionably enhance, as well as complement, current capabilities of forward deployed forces called upon to respond to global challenges, but should never be recognized as a budget cutting solution to the cost of providing a capable force. "Real presence" will remain an absolute requirement if the United States expects to continue building coalitions, strengthening alliances, and protecting national interests. Virtual presence cannot even pretend to offer real presence necessary to support those national objectives; neither can it be viewed, to a lesser extent, to provide an alternative to the repeatedly proven ways of deployed naval and Marine forces. The technological advances being made by the Air Force are necessary and essential but only as a means of enhancing joint warfighting capabilities, not as a stand alone solution that will solve all the problems of cost efficient forward presence. Douhet and Mitchell never came to appreciate the "value of just being there."

THE CURRENT DEBATE

The nature of modern warfare demands that we fight as a team. This does not mean that all forces will be represented in each operation. Joint force commanders choose the capabilities they need from the air, land, sea, ...

Joint Pub 1

Currently, the naval forces, including amphibious ready groups, shoulder most of the responsibility of providing forward presence. But will it always be the case? The Quadrennial Defense Review will once again address this often studied question as decision makers define the force structure of the future. One thing is certain, answers will not be found by espousing myopic views such as, "In the array of military capabilities available to the US, the Air Force has become the First Force;"[17] or "Early in

a conflict—with our range, our speed, our flexibility, our maneuverability, our lethality—airmen will be first engaged. They will get there first; they will be in a position to set the battlefield while other forces are deploying."[18] Interservice debate over missions and mission area capabilities can be healthy and productive but must be responsible, proactive, and ongoing. The rivalry should never result in views as shallow as those quoted above, which constitute a disservice to the debate process. For the foreseeable future, and well beyond, America's national defense posture will depend on the judicious deployment and employment of state of the art joint land, air, sea, and space forces composed to accomplish operational tasks at minimum cost and minimum attrition.[19] A much more prophetic statement would have been: "In the array of military capabilities, joint warfare has become the First Force."

At the heart of this debate is the Air Force's contention that B-2s will be more efficient and cost effective in supporting the national military strategy by providing an alternative for forward presence and subsequently responding to a conflict should it ever occur. This assertion is no different than it was over fifty years ago when the newly formed Air Force espoused the superiority of the B-36 over the aircraft carrier in projecting power over long distances. Air Force technocrats may feel justified in their assertion, given the evolution in stealth and weaponry, but what still fails their logic is the extremely high probability of United States forces having to stay proactively engaged, proving a sustained level of effort. Nor does it address the long term recognition of a lasting, enduring and visible commitment; or as more simply stated by General Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps, "If you think a B-2 bomber flying at 60,000 feet is going to mean diddly squat to people you are wrong. What makes an impact is for them

to look out and see a gray ship. That is presence."[20] The point is, strategic bombers do play an important role in projecting power, but only when the shooting starts. The synergistic effects of the B-2, or for that matter, the B-1B and B-52H, are best realized as a complementary force which expands the range of available options afforded the joint force commander in working towards the attainment of stated strategic and operational objectives. The primacy of these assets becomes quite evident when considering the limited availability of overseas bases. For Air Force, Army and Marine tactical forces, what still remains essential in today's unpredictable international environment, is traditional forward presence, tasked with creditably upholding the precepts of the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Military Strategy*.

THE RIGHT CHOICES

U.S. overseas presence visibly supports our strategy of engagement, and we must continually assess the best approaches to achieving its objective.

National Security Strategy

The challenge facing today's military planners, as we continue to move beyond the long defined military posture required during Cold War world, is to better understand how best to employ the vast, unique, and constantly improving capabilities of all United States military forces. The fact that interservice debate has raged for nearly fifty years, with no significant impact on roles and missions, should have long ago sent a message. It's time to move beyond the arguments and accept the fact that there will be a logical mix of strategic bombers and aircraft carriers and other tactical ground, sea, and air forces. Forward presence is vital to the nation's strategy of building coalitions, maintaining ties with friends and allies, and continually demonstrating commitment to

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maintaining a secure international environment. How that is enhanced will be dependent upon how effectively Air Force doctrine is utilized as an enabler in peacetime rather than conflict. Regional theater commanders want genuine combat power that is credible and readily available, not virtual, whatever that means, especially if it's 20 hours away and proportionate to the intended use. They want military options other than bombing the enemy back to the Stone Age.[21]

The Air Force is making progress in their vision. Rather than a broad brush vision as published in *Global Presence 1995*, it has refined its latest vision with *Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force.* No longer has it put reliance on its strategic bomber force and its ability to provide virtual presence. Its emphasis has shifted to the Air Expeditionary Force(AEF), capable of providing a worldwide forward presence within 48 hours, as demonstrated in past deployments to Bahrain, Jordan, and Qatar. The only major obstacle that stands in the way of enhancing this global deployment concept is securing relations with a large number of geographically separate foreign nations, necessary to gain such presence anywhere on earth that is within striking distance of any potential target.

Neither can the Navy rest on its laurels. To remain a credible forward deployed force, capable of operating freely in the littorals, it must expand and enhance its mine warfare capabilities and continue to develop a theater missile defense capability which ensures dominance on the sea, in the air, and on the land. Just as the air war in Desert Storm was an aberration in terms of convenient airfields, so, too, was the Navy's ability to operate in the littorals or the Arabian Gulf, free from a submarine threat or credible air/missile attack. It did have to relearn it's lesson in mine warfare. Past success does

not guarantee the same in future operations! The Navy must continue to practice anti-submarine warfare and place more emphasis on mine warfare and missile defense if it is to remain survivable on the oceans and in the littorals when projecting power ashore or acting as an enabler during the deployment of follow-on forces in times of conflict.

A vexing problem facing both services now and in the future is the acquisition of next generation aircraft--in particular, tactical aircraft. Placing too much reliance on stealth technology may end up as too costly, as evidenced in current debates concerning the ability to fund future construction of the F-22 and Joint Strike Fighter. The fiscal realities of such an investment will require a balanced approach to combat readiness and acquisition. Some critics question whether a tremendous investment in technology will offer a substantial return in combat capability. The possibility exists that stealth technology might be easily countered by advances in radar and infrared technologies that can see heat signatures, optics that can see at night, and advanced acoustics that can sense the tell-tale roar of even the quietest aircraft engines.[22] Has the Navy, given marginal enhancements in range, weapons, and stealth, made the right choice in buying 1,000 F/A-18E/Fs at a cost of $81 million per aircraft? Or is the Air Force headed in the right direction, buying 442 F-22s at a cost of $158 million per aircraft, based primarily on the strength that stealth technology currently brings to the fight?

During the Gulf War, Iraq demonstrated some degree of ability to detect the F-117. It is only a matter of time before future technologies and/or old capabilities are brought to bear to neutralize stealth, rendering it vulnerable to air defense systems. Additionally, the F-117 never executed its missions during daylight hours, an indictment of stealth's limited application during conflict. Consequently, incorporating stealth in future

strike/fighter aircraft may degrade the ability to demonstrate presence in scenarios short

of war. Where is the deterrent effect if radar screens are unable to detect invisible

aircraft? Stealth technology may be a cure-all for enhancing survivability during strike

missions, but limited application in operations other than war may degrade the ability to

demonstrate real presence.

CONCLUSION

Whosoever can hold the sea has command of everything.

Themistocles

There's no question that all services are built and trained to fight and win wars. Short

of war though, there are the overarching requirements of the *National Security Strategy*

and the *National Military Strategy* that must be sustained in peacetime. An essential

element in each of these strategies is forward presence. During the past five decades

forward presence has repeatedly been valuable in strengthening alliances, building

coalitions, ensuring economic trade routes, maintaining secure sea lines of

communication, containing Soviet expansion, and projecting power ashore. The value of

the carrier battle group and accompanying amphibious ready group is undeniable. U.S.

based bombers and other permanently deployed forces have great value under some

circumstances, but they do not represent the carrier and amphibious ready group's

equivalent in terms of flexibility, capability, and usefulness to decision makers and

regional commanders during operations other than war.[23]

Forward presence can be an equal opportunity employer if the Air Force is successful

in deploying the AEF to regions other than the Middle East. However, unlike the carrier,

the AEF will be limited in its flexibility and usefulness if foreign borders/bases are closed to it, or operations are restricted within the borders of a host nation. When the AEF is successful in gaining sanction to operate freely in a troubled region, commanders will be blessed by the seldom enjoyment or option of using our fewer carrier battle groups in other areas or grant them a brief respite.

"In a constantly changing world, where risks are unclear, challenges unknown, and response time limited, naval forces offer a full range of options to build friendships in peace, defeat adversaries in war, assist citizens in peril, and support populations in distress."[24]

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